

THE MUSHROOM CLOUD THINKING FOSTERED BY OUR WAR ON TERROR

Foreign Policy has a must read article describing how much more support for torture there is now than there was when it was the affirmative policy of our country.

Respondents in 2012 are more pro-waterboarding, pro-threatening prisoners with dogs, pro-religious humiliation, and pro-forcing-prisoners-to-remain-naked-and-chained-in-uncomfortable-positions-in-cold-rooms. In 2005, 18 percent said they believed the naked chaining approach was OK, while 79 percent thought it was wrong. In 2012, 30 percent of Americans thought this technique was right, an increase of 12 points, while just 51 percent thought it was wrong, a drop of 28 points. In 2005, only 16 percent approved of waterboarding suspected terrorists, while an overwhelming majority (82 percent) thought it was wrong to strap people on boards and force their heads underwater to simulate drowning. Now, 25 percent of Americans believe in waterboarding terrorists, and only 55 percent think it's wrong. The only specific interrogation technique that is less popular now than in 2005, strangely enough, is prolonged sleep deprivation.

I actually find that last statistic—that people oppose the one torture technique we still use more than they did in 2005—rather interesting. There really hasn't been any outcry about our "isolation" treatment, which can include sleep deprivation and sensory manipulation. Nevertheless, that's the only thing people are more opposed to than they used to be.

But I'm just as interested in FP's throwaway question, showing that a quarter of Americans would support nuking terrorists.

A quarter of all Americans are willing to use nuclear weapons to kill terrorists. No joke. This was among many surprising findings in a new national poll that YouGov recently ran for me on hot-button intelligence issues. (The poll, conducted between Aug. 24 and 30, 2012, surveyed 1,000 people and has a margin of error of +/- 4 percentage points).

To be honest, I threw in the nuclear bomb question on a lark, not expecting to find much. Boy, was I wrong.

Now, I don't think we're about to drop any nukes on Waziristan anytime soon (though now that we've improved our bunker busters, I don't guarantee we wouldn't use them the next time someone hides in a place like Tora Bora). I assume these 25% are just crazies who don't think about much beyond force.

But consider what it says about the general mood in this country, 11 years after 9/11, that a quarter of the country would consider both violating all norms of civility that have grown out of WWII and killing lots and lots of innocent civilians to take out a few terrorists.

That's the background lurking behind our drone debate, I think. I'm not saying that drone supporters are this idiotic. I do take their discussion of "surgical strikes" in good faith, regardless of how questionable that claim can be in light of our dodgy intelligence and use of signature strikes. And no matter how hard they have to twist to claim the drone strikes are legal, I also believe that is also good faith argumentation.

What I am suggesting is that the underlying mood in this country is such that low information citizens embrace astounding views. In the same

way that lots of dog whistle racism from the elite encourages birthers to sustain outrageous beliefs, so too does the assumption that our best weapon against terrorism is force permits people who don't think things through to believe that nukes would ever be an effective—much less appropriate—response to terrorism.